

P.A. BOWEN HOUSE  
15701 Dr. Bowen Road  
Aquasco  
Prince George's County  
Maryland

HABS NO. MD-990

HABS  
MD  
17-AQUA  
5-

PHOTOGRAPHS AND  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

P.A. BOWEN HOUSE

HABS NO. MD-990

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MD  
17-AQUA,  
5-

Location: 15701 Dr. Bowen Road, Aquasco, Prince George's County, Maryland

Present Owner: Stephen and Barbara Sonnett

Present Use: Private residence and horse farm

Significance: The P.A. Bowen House is an atypical example of the side-hall-and-double-parlor plan popularly used in the finer homes of Prince George's County's planter and merchant class, in that it was built much later than most, and with Victorian rather than Federal-era detailing. The side-hall-and-double-parlor plan was most popularly employed from the 1820s to 1850s, while this example dates from the 1870s, making it an unusual carry-over of a previous building tradition. The Italianate style, in general, is uncommon in Prince George's County.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The P.A. Bowen House was built ca. 1870. Bowen's deed for the property was executed in 1869. According to his grandson, Philander A. Bowen moved his family here in 1870, just after tearing down the dwelling then on the property (though the current kitchen may be part of the original house) and building the present house (interview by Susan Pearl with Dr. Harry Lee Bowen, April 1984).
2. Original and subsequent owners: The property remained in the Bowen family until 1927. It passed from Philander A. Bowen & wife to their second son, Dr. William Sinclair Bowen, in 1913, who in turned passed it on to his sister and her husband, Margaret and J. Frank Parran, in 1920. From 1927 to 1970 the farm was owned by the Craycroft and Elliot families. Since 1970 it has been the home of Stephen and Barbara Sonnett.
4. Alterations and additions: What was originally a porch along the rear of the main block was enclosed in the 1970s. A three-bay section was added along the south side of the house in 1985. These two sections connect to

form a solarium addition. The west rear wall of the library was removed so that it too opens onto the solarium. Also in the 1970s, a one-and-a-half-story addition was made to the west rear of the kitchen wing to add a tack room with a studio loft above.

#### B. Historical Context:

This Victorian-era rural dwelling is among the few in Prince George's County with Italianate style detailing. Furthermore, although the general plan--side hall and double parlors--was a common house type in the county, it was generally constructed during the early to mid-19th century and thus displayed elements of earlier styles such as Federal and Greek Revival. Most of the Victorian-era houses in the county take the form of a four-room, and/or an asymmetrical plan.

A look at Hopkins Atlas of 1879 reveals that Aquasco, formerly Woodville, was at that time a thriving town. It included stores, grange hall, school house, blacksmith shop, and numerous churches and residences. Little remains of this today. The town's success at that time was probably tied to the Patuxent River, located just east of Aquasco. There were a number of ferry landings near here. Thus, the shipment of agricultural goods must have hinged on river transport prior to the coming of the railroad through southern Maryland.

In 1862, Philander A. Bowen purchased 477-1/2 acres of "Buttington" and "Purchase" from the estate of George A.M. Turner (though the deed was not executed until 1869). The farm had been known as the "Aquasco Mill Farm" and during the mid-19th century consisted of a dwelling house, tobacco shed, stable, meat house and grist mill (King).

P.A. Bowen, who was listed as a teacher living in Georgetown ca. 1850, purchased this farm so that his wife, a native of Prince George's County, could be closer to her family. Bowen moved his family here ca. 1870, after tearing down the Turner residence and building the current residence (Dr. Harry Lee Bowen, grandson). Bowen evidently took up farming at this point, for he is listed in the 1880 Census as a farmer. He was said to have been a respected, well-to-do member of the community, highly regarded for his education. He passed away in 1919 leaving the farm to his family: two sons, both respected physicians, and a daughter. The property remained in the family until 1927 (King).

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The house is a good example of a late side-hall-and-double parlor plan. As such, this house combines a Federal-era plan with Victorian-era detailing. Built ca. 1870, its detailing is of the Italianate style, characterized by elements such as the bracketed cornice and porch, and floor to ceiling front facade windows. The interior, as well, has highly ornate Italianate detailing such as the plaster cornices, heavy decorative balustrade with bull's eye design, and stone mantels with keystone.

2. Condition of fabric: The house appears to be in very good condition. The 1870s main block appears intact, although the rear porches have been enclosed and added to in the 1970s and 1980s.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The main block is a two-and-a-half-story, three-bay-by-two-bay structure measuring approximately 30' x 34', with a one-bay, two-story wing, measuring approximately 17' x 13'. To the northwest rear is a two-story, two-bay gable-roofed kitchen wing, measuring approximately 26' x 14', to the rear of which is attached a one-and-a-half-story, one-bay addition. A series of porches along the west rear of the main block and south wing have been enclosed and added to form a solarium addition.

2. Foundations: The house rests on a brick foundation.

3. Walls: The exterior walls are covered with German siding.

4. Structural system, framing: The house is of wood-frame, balloon construction.

5. Porches: There is a porch along the east front of the main block, extending past the facade at the north end and joining with another porch (this one screened). Together they wrap around the north side of the main block to the kitchen wing. The front porch is supported by ornate chamfered posts, with brackets to the sides and front of each post (the front bracket with a cut-out floral design). At the east front of the south wing is

a glass-enclosed porch, with the porch brackets remaining.

6. Chimneys: There are a total of five chimneys. There are two interior chimneys at the north gable end of the main block, one to each side of the peak of the roof. There is a third at the south side of the main block. Another is located at the center of the south side of the south wing. Lastly, there is a chimney to the west rear of the kitchen wing. All are of brick construction with corbelled tops.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The front entry is to the south end of the main block. The doorway has a frontispiece with a two-light transom and four-light sidelights (no corner lights) with a molded wooden panel below. The otherwise plain surround is chamfered and slightly shouldered. It has ornately carved, double four-panel doors, with double screen doors as well. There are also entries at the north side--from the screened porch to the kitchen wing, and from the tack room addition to the rear of the kitchen.

b. Windows: The typical window is a four-over-four-light double-hung-sash window with a wide crown-molding lintel and wooden sill. The two parlor windows on the first story of the front facade are four-over-six-light-sash windows, extending from floor to ceiling. There are two-over-two-light-sash windows in the gable ends of the main block. All windows have louvered shutters. On the second floor of the front facade, over the entry, is a tripartite window consisting of a four-over-four-light-sash window with narrow two-over-two-light, sidelight windows, with a chamfered architrave and crown-molding lintel. The glass-enclosed porch at the front southeast corner of the house has twelve-over-twelve-light-sash windows.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The main block has a side-gabled roof covered with composition shingles. The rear kitchen wing also has a gable roof (perpendicular to the main block), but it is

covered with corrugated metal. The tack room wing to the rear of the kitchen has a gable roof covered with composition shingles. The south wing of the house has a low shed roof, hidden behind a false-front parapet--very unusual for a residential structure. The enclosed wrap-around porches to the rear have shed roofs.

b. Cornice, eaves: The main block and south wing of the house have narrow boxed-return cornices with crown molding, and decorative cut-out brackets along the cornice and eaves. The rear kitchen and tack room wings have plain boxed cornices.

c. Dormers: There are two dormers at the front facade. They have two-over-two-light double-hung-sash windows, and gable roofs with decorative cut-out designs in the gable ends. To the rear are two more dormers. The north dormer is identical to those on the east facade. The south dormer is a large shed-roof dormer with a tripartite window, added in the 1970s to light the third-floor stairhall.

#### C. Description of Interior:

##### 1. Floor plans:

a. First floor: The main block of the house consists of a large stairhall running the width of the house with double (front and back) parlors to the north side. The stairway runs along the south wall of the stairhall. Doorways from the stairhall lead to the northeast (living room) and northwest (dining room) parlors which adjoin each other with paneled pocket doors. A door at the west end of the stairhall leads to the rear porch (now enclosed). A doorway at the south wall at the foot of the stair leads to the library wing. The rear west wall having been removed, the library now opens up to the enclosed porch solarium which wraps around the rear south and southwest elevations. The kitchen wing is located to the northwest and is also now open onto the enclosed porch section (with a doorway into the dining room also). To the rear of the kitchen is the tack room addition.

b. Second floor: The second floor follows the same basic pattern as the first floor, with three

bedrooms, one over each of the two parlors and the south library. Like the first floor, the rooms are all located off the central stairhall. There is a bathroom over the front entry.

c. Third floor: The third floor has one large room, and one small room which has been converted into a bathroom.

2. Stairways: The stairway is a closed-string, open-well, two-flight stair with heavy ornamental Victorian newel and balustrade. The stair rises along the south wall of the stairhall to a landing across the west wall and then turns along the north wall. It continues in the same manner to the third floor. It has a heavy newel with a beveled and fluted post with bull's eyes, and a square newel cap with a half circle atop it. It has a heavy molded banister with turned balusters with a bull's-eye square block to the center. The newels at each turn in the stairway are simplified versions of the primary newel (without the fluting and bull's eyes), with ornamental pendants extending down past the floor above. A back stair (unornamented) is located in the modern tack room addition.

3. Flooring: The house has narrow wooden flooring throughout. The floors in the stairhall are of particular note, having alternating dark and light wood boards, giving a striped effect.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are plaster. The twelve foot ceilings of the first floor of the main block (and south section), including stairhall, have a stepped crown-molding cornice. There is also crown-molding chair rail and baseboards. Ceiling medallions have been added recently in the stairhall and south library. Floral-pattern stencilling has been applied in the stairhall, by the current owner.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: All doorways have a wide surround with an architrave backband. The doors are four panel (with box locks), with the exception of the pocket doors between the two parlors which are tall, six-panel double doors. The doors on the second and third floors have transom lights.

b. Windows: The windows have symmetrically molded surrounds with two large beads to the center. The front parlor windows extend from floor to ceiling, flooding the room with light.

6. Decorative features and trim: There are decorative Victorian-era mantels throughout the house. There are three mantels on the first floor (one in each of the parlors and in the south library). They are of stone painted white, with incised linear decorations, keystone, round-arched hearth opening, and chamfered edges. There are carved wood mantels in the second floor bedrooms. Those in the northwest and south bedrooms are identical. Chamfered pilasters flank the square hearth opening, with bull's eye bracketed mantel shelf and a frieze with a bull's eye to the center. The mantel in the northeast bedroom has paired pilasters with chamfered edges flanking the square hearth opening. Elaborate brackets support the mantel shelf under which is located a paneled frieze.

7. Hardware: There are box locks on most of the doors, and the hinges are patterned.

8. Mechanical equipment: There is a cistern on the third floor above the northwest bedroom. According to a plaque on the cistern, it was manufactured by the Baltimore Cooperage Tank and Tower Builders, Baltimore, Maryland (no date).

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The P.A. Bowen House is set back, off Dr. Bowen Road on a tree shaded knoll--the highest point of the 17.8 acre horse farm. The drive circles around in front of the house.

2. Outbuildings: The only remaining 19th-century outbuildings appear to be a smokehouse and a tobacco barn. Supposedly there was once a brick stable, an ice house, and an early twentieth-century milk barn with a brick silo (still standing) and corn crib. The smokehouse, originally one-bay-by-one-bay has 1930s additions, converting it into a small servant's dwelling. The tobacco barn is in poor condition but has heavy hand-hewn framing, the framework for hanging tobacco, and vertical siding with hinged ventilation panels. There is also a concrete block, 1930s-40s garage just north of the house, and a small one-bay-by-one-bay frame well house.



To the rear of the house is a large 20th-century gambrel-roof shed or chicken coop with board-and-batten siding, and a six-bay-by-two-bay wooden shed (both of which have hewn timbers, probably reused from earlier structures). Lastly, there is a large stable and barn to the northwest of the house, rebuilt from an older barn in the 1970s.

### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

#### A. Bibliography:

King, Marina, Susan Pearl et al. Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form, P.A. Bowen Farm, prepared August 1984 & December 1986.

Hopkins, G.M. Hopkin's Atlas of Prince George's County, Maryland (Washington, D.C.: G.M. Hopkins Publisher, 1879).

### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of the P.A. Bowen House was undertaken as part of a cooperative project between the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission to document select sites throughout the county. A memorandum of agreement was signed in August of 1988 and the project, to span one year, was begun in January of 1989. Gail Rothrock, director and Susan G. Pearl, research historian, of the HPC made the site selections. They also provided access to their historical research and information on file with the HPC, as well as their extensive knowledge of county history. The large format photography was undertaken by HABS photographer, Jack E. Boucher. The historical reports were prepared by HABS historian, Catherine C. Lavoie who also accompanied the photographer into the field for on site investigations.